

Workers' Playtime

Being too poor to own a car, we'd book a bus trip each bank holiday to the south west coast or, later, the Moon. The coast had donkeys and fairground rides, but the Moon had better rockpools, and Dad and I would spend hours with nets on bamboo canes, catching quick fish with bulging eyes and transparent skin, just to see their atom hearts beating before we gently lowered them back into their natural element. I'd fill my pockets with vivid shells that carried voices from deep space, patterned like galaxies, though I knew that back in my bedroom they'd be silent and dark. Most of the shops would be shut but we'd buy brittle wafers that tasted of vinegar and sea air, then strawberry ice cream in vacuum-sealed packs. We'd break even in the penny arcades, then stand on the shore that in those days seemed to stretch forever, skimming slivers of feldspar in the rough direction of Earth. We'd both doze in our seats on the way home, but I remember the retired cosmonauts singing in Russian at the back of the bus as they passed round Lunar spirit in an engraved flask. One time, Dad let me try a sip. I can still feel it burning on my tongue.